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AUTHOR Nieva, Veronica F.
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ABSTRACT

Until recently there has been little research interest in the possible impact of sex on leadership. Both general leadership research and the more recent materials on women who are leaders concentrated upon three areas of leadership--personality, style, and power--with the subordinate reactions they elicit. Traditionally, women have been viewed by both sexes as the antithesis of the desirable leader personality, but research on men and women actually occupying leadership positions denies the stereotypic view held by their own supervisors. The validity of leadership as personality has begun to be questioned. Using the sex-linked styles of Consideration (female) and Initiating Structure (male), including criticism of its validity, subordinates reacted negatively to female supervisors reflecting perceived lack of female power, while being supportive of most sex-role congruency. Power differences for both anatomy and mastery were common and may account for the negative reactions to female leaders because they are not allowed to function effectively. Presently, subordinates hold strong beliefs about sex-linked differences, despite contrary research data. (LS)

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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS:

RESEARCH TO DATE

By

Veronica F. Nieva

Advanced Research Resources Organization
4330 East West Highway
Washington D.C. 20014

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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: RESEARCH TO DATE

Only recently, with the movement of women into positions of power, has concern about women leaders begun to emerge. For a long time, research has been little interested in the possible impact of sex on leadership -- leadership research has been concerned largely with men leading other men, and occasionally with men leading women. Most studies have focused exclusively on male samples, or have ignored the sex of the leader in their analyses.

This paper reviews the literature on women who <u>are</u> leaders, few as their numbers may be at the present. It does not deal with issues of leadership emergence or recognition. Neither does it attempt to address the much larger questionsof why there are so few women leaders, or what the barriers are to women's achievement of positions of importance in various fields of endeavor. Attempting to answer such questions would require an effort of much broader scope, and would include issues such as women's achievement drive and motivations, the opportunity structure of society at large, the problem of status generalization, among others.

Three strands of research are reviewed. The bulk of the research on women and leadership has followed in the footsteps of general leadership research. The first type of research follows the personality interpretation of leadership: that leaders are a chosen breed who possess special characteristics. These researchers ask whether women possess the traits appropriate

or necessary for positions of leadership. The second group focuses on leadership style, and look for differences in the leadership style of male and female leaders as well as the subordinate reactions these styles elicit. The third perspective on leadership is one that has only begun to emerge, and for which very little empirical evidence as yet exists. This viewpoint holds that leadership is power, and that power accounts for the differences in subordinate reactions to male and female leaders.

Women and Leadership as Personality

Traditionally, women have been seen by both sexes as undesirable superiors, unfit for positions of leadership (Haavio-Mannila, 1972). Several opinion surveys demonstrate the prevalence of beliefs about women's unsuitability for leadership roles. Gilmer (1961), for example, found that 65 percent of the male managers surveyed believed that female supervisors were inferior to male supervisors. The managers also believed that women were more neurotic than men and had higher absenteeism and more work-related problems than men. Similarly, Bowman, Worthy, and Greyser (1965) found that 51 percent of their male respondents thought that females were temperamentally unfit for management.

Women are seen as not possessing the necessary attributes for leadership. They are believed to be complaint, submissive, emotional, and to have great difficulty in making decisions (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970). They are characterized by qualities such as dependence, passivity, fragility, non-aggression, and non-competitiveness (Bardwick & Douvan, 1972). Men, on the other hand, are seen as independent, objective, rational, aggressive, and

competitive--characteristics not only appropriate to the healthy adult (Broverman et al., 1970) but also closely allied to the image of "successful middle managers" (Schein, 1973, 1975). Schein asked three hundred middle managers to rate women in general, men in general, or successful middle managers on 92 descriptive terms. She found that the mean ratings of men and managers were significantly similar on 60 traits (e.g., emotionally stable; aggressive; self reliant; vigorous, desiring of responsibility; well-informed and direct), whereas there was a significant resemblance between women and managers on only 8 fronts (e.g., understanding, aware of feelings, neat).

Writers in business administration have tended to encourage beliefs in the inappropriateness of women for positions of leadership. McGregor (1967) for example, describes the successful manager in this manner "the model of the successful manager in our culture is a masculine one. The good manager is aggressive, competitive, firm and just. He is not feminine; he is not soft or yielding or dependent or intuitive in the womanly sense. The very expression of emotion is widely viewed as a feminine weakness that would interfere with effective business process" (p. 23). Unfortunately, beliefs about women's inappropriateness for positions of leadership and management are not held by men alone. The perceived conflict between the image of women and the image of successful managers is just as real for

women as for men (Schein, 1973, 1975).

Reviews of research into sex differences on personality traits presumed to be important or detrimental to leadership (e.g., Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) show that there is probably some factual basis, though limited, for stereotypical views about the dichotomous distribution of certain personality traits in the total population. The most consistent support of leadership-related stereotypes is found for aggressiveness--Maccoby & Jacklin, (1974) conclude that males are, in reality, more overtly agressive than females in a wide variety of situations and using many different measures. Other studies of sex differences on leadership-relevant traits show mixed results. The majority of studies on competitiveness, for example, have demonstrated no sex differences (e.g., Komorita & Mechling, 1967; Miller, 1967; Speer, 1972). A similar pattern is found for compliance and influenceability (e.g., Nisbett & Gordon, 1967; Willis & Willis 1970; Wyer, 1967). However, the few studies that have reported sex differences tend to support popular belief--males show more competitiveness (e.g., Kahn, Hottes & Davis, 1971) and less compliance (e.g., Cook, Bean, Calder, Frey, Krovetz & Reisman, 1970, Hollander and Haaland, 1965) than females.

More important than the studies on sex differences in the general population are those investigating differences between men and women who actually occupy leadership positions. In general, stereotypic

notions on the distribution of traits in male and female leaders have not been substantiated. A study of 40 high school department heads, for example, found no significant sex differences in aggressiveness, suggestibility, professional knowledge, and sense of power (Roussell, 1974). Strache's (1976) recent study of 22 male and 22 female university administrators, in fact, reports results opposite to those which would be predicted from the general stereotypes. Comparisons between the male and female administrators on five traits of managerial interest taken from the Cattell Sixteen Personality Factor Test (1973)--Decisiveness, Objectivity, Emotional Stability, Warmheartedness, and Passivity--showed the women as significantly less warmhearted, less passive, and more objective than the men. In each case, the women's scores were closer to the managerial stereotype than were those of their male counterparts.

Interestingly, when the supervisors of these administrators in the Strache (1976) study rated them on these same traits, the supervisors apparently responded according to general stereotypes. They rated the males as more objective than the males themselves scored, and they underrated the women on Decisiveness, while overrating them for Warmheartedness. Strache's (1976) findings show that stereotypes concerning the traits of women in general are applied to women in leadership positions even though such applications may be invalid.

Although the women administrators in the study were actually more similar to the managerial model than their male colleagues, they were perceived as being less similar to the model than the males.

It is probably a useless exercise to try to determine whether women do or do not possess the personality traits "necessary" for leadership. Whether by the process of selection (if one believes that personality traits are stable and unchanging) or development (if one believes that traits can develop as a response to one's situation), or both, it seems likely that individuals, whether male or female, who occupy positions of leadership tend to possess the characteristics which allow them to cope well in their positions.

A more basic question concerns the validity of the interpretation of leadership as personality, on which the traditional beliefs regarding women's unsuitability for leadership are based. Although this perspective on leadership is still held by many people, reviews of research on differences between leaders and followers (e.g., Bass, 1960; Gibb, 1969; Mann, 1959; Vroom, 1976) have come to the general conclusion that there is little utility to the oversimplified conception of leadership as personality. Few traits have been found to distinguish the leaders from the led, and large degrees of overlap between the personalities of leaders and followers have been discovered. In addition, because situational demands vary so much,

there is little guarantee that personality traits that seem to make a good leader in one situation will be equally appropriate in another.

Women and Leadership Styles

Male and female leadership styles. The Ohio State studies on leadership (e.g., Fleishman, 1957; Halpin & Winer, 1957) identified two factors on leadership styles--Consideration and Initiating Structure--which have become the basis for much subsequent research on leadership in general, and sex differences and leadership in particular. This differentiation parallels that made by Bales (1953), who proposed categories of leaders who have a greater socio-emotional orientation and those who are predominantly task oriented. Consideration includes supervisory behavior "indicative of friendship, mutual trust, respect, and warmth," while Initiating Structure includes behavior in which "the supervisor organizes and defines group activities and his relation to the group" (Halpin & Winer, 1957, p. 57).

Popular belief suggests that these two leadership styles are sex-linked--female leaders are considerate, supportive and emotionally oriented, while male leaders are initiating, assertive, and task oriented. These notions emerged from a combination of forces. One influence came from personality-oriented research which shows that women are more concerned with interpersonal relationships while men

are concerned with tasks (e.g., Bardwick, 1971; Bass, 1965). A second influence was derived from sociological work on role differentiation in small groups (Bales and Slater, 1955). Bales and his colleagues originally proposed that two contrasting patterns of behavior--task-oriented behaviors and socio-emotional behaviors--are mutually exclusive and undertaken by separate "specialists" in the group. Parsons and Bales (1955) applied this analysis to the nuclear family, stating that "the more instrumental role in the sub-system is taken by the husband, the more expressive by the wife" (p. 151). These associations were extended further, equating the expressive, socio-emotional function with femininity, and the task-oriented, instrumental functions with masculinity.

Both the ideas of function specialization in groups (Bonacich & Lewis, 1973; Lewis, 1972) and the sex-linkage of these functions (Arnoff & Crano, 1975; Leik, 1963) have been subject to criticism. These criticisms focus on the non-exclusive nature of these functions, and consequently, on the invalidity of assigning separate functions to each sex. Within the context of the work organization, the evidence available thus far suggests that the beliefs in the existence of different task-oriented male and emotionally-oriented female leadership styles are unfounded. Women in leadership positions function similarly to men in the same circumstances. This appears

to be true of a variety of comparisons conducted across a range of situations. Day and Stogdill's (1972) field study, for example, compared subordinate descriptions of 38 male and 38 female supervisors in the U. S. Air Force Logistics Command. They found no significant differences between males and females on the twelve scales of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (Stogdill, Goode & Day, 1962), e.g., structure, persuasiveness, consideration, production emphasis, and influence with supervisors. In a 1973 national probability sample, Hansen (1974) found no sex differences on subordinate perceptions of supervisor goal facilitation (a concept similar to task orientation and initiation of structure) and support (similar to socio-emotional orientation and consideration) even when sex of the subordinate and job level were taken into account. Bartol (1973), likewise, found no differences between male and female leaders in group maintenance and goal achievement behavior in a simulated management game. A later study, of 75 supervisory and 127 non-supervisory employees in a large government-operated psychiatric hospital (Bartol and Wortman, 1975) also found no sex differences on 11 out of the 12 Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire scales.

Reactions to male and female leaders. Since little support exists for the existence of real differences in male and female supervisory behavior, the important issue appears to lie in how

subordinates react to their leaders. Although male and female supervisors appear to behave similarly, reactions of their subordinates to their like behaviors differ.

Given the negative feelings generally held about women as supervisors, one might expect that individuals who have female supervisors would tend to feel more negative toward their supervisors in general than would those who have male supervisors. A number of field studies show general supporting evidence for this expectation. Hansen (1974) found that groups led by male supervisors tend to be more satisfied with their supervisors than groups led by females. Rousell (1974) found that male-led groups had higher esprit de corps, while female-led groups scored higher in negative feelings like hindrance.

Different results have been shown, however, by laboratory studies. No differences were found in satisfaction with male or female leaders in Maier's (1970) role-playing study and in Bartol's (1975) management game.

These different results are not as contradictory as they may appear at first. In a further analysis, Hansen (1974) found that only high status subordinates with female supervisors were less satisfied than subordinates with male supervisors. While leadership in low status positions may be regarded as acceptable for women,

their leadership status in high-status positions may be regarded as especially anomalous. Another possible reason, unconnected to rank, may lie in Hansen's additional finding that female supervisors tend to have less autonomy than their male counterparts. If the female supervisors do not themselves possess real power within the organization, this puts a severe limitation on the extent to which they can mediate for their subordinates. This also explains another interesting sidelight uncovered by Hansen's (1974) study--that the behavior of female supervisors appears to have smaller impact on the satisfaction of their subordinates than the behavior of male supervisors has on their subordinates' satisfaction. If the female supervisors have relatively little leeway to exercise their supervisory prerogatives, it follows that the little they can do can have very limited effects on their subordinates.

This argument of limited powers is congruent with the Goetz and Herman (1976) explanation for their finding that groups with female supervisors are less satisfied with pay and promotions than those with male supervisors. These authors suggest that employee dissatisfaction with promotions and pay may reflect the degree to which female, as compared to male, supervisors have influence on their own superiors. If these contextual factors do in fact account for the differences in satisfaction in male-led and female-led groups, it

is not surprising that such differences were not found in the laboratory simulation studies, which are conducted within an artifical vacuum devoid of actual organizational factors.

Supervisor sex and supervisory style. In addition to examining the gross differences in satisfaction in groups supervised by men and women, studies have also investigated the effects of supervisor sex and subordinate sex on reactions to particular supervisory styles. These effects are important because leadership is an interactive process, and the effectiveness of the leader is largely dependent on the reactions of those led.

Evaluations of supervisory behavior depend, in large part, on the congruence between sex role norms and the supervisory style exhibited. Thus, since women are expected to be sympathetic, humanitarian, compassionate (Tyler 1965) and concerned for the welfare of others (Miner, 1965), it might be expected that women supervisors would receive better evaluation than their male counterparts when exhibiting considerate supervisory behavior. On the other hand, since it is appropriate for males to be aggressive and to take the initiative in situations (Miner, 1965), male supervisors would be rated higher than their female counterparts when exhibiting initiating and structuring behaviors.

Bartol and Butterfield's (1976) recent study supported this notion

that different standards are used to evaluate male and female supervisors when they use similar styles. Male and female business students were administered one of either a male or female version of a questionnaire containing four stories, each depicting a leadership style based on one of the following leadership dimensions--initiating structure, consideration, production emphasis, and tolerance of freedom. In line with expectations, male managers who exhibited initiating behavior were rated significantly better than female managers who used the same style, regardless of the sex of the evaluator. Also, female managers exhibiting the consideration style were evaluated more highly than male managers using the same style. Rosen and Jerdee's (1973) study of undergraduate students and bank supervisors also found some evidence of the influence of sex-role stereotypes on evaluations of hypothetical male and female supervisory behavior. They found that the reward style (i.e., advising subordinates that forthcoming recommendations for salary increases would depend on improved performance) was judged as significantly more effective for male supervisors than for female supervisors. There was also a tendency, though not statistically significant, for the threat style (i.e., advising subordinates that they would be discharged unless their work improved significantly) to be seen as more effective for male then for female supervisors.

Aside from affecting evaluations of the supervisor, supervisor sex and supervisory style have also been found to affect the subordinate's general job satisfaction and satisfaction with the supervisor. Once again, there was support for the sex-role congruency notion. Petty and Lee (1975) found that, among 165 non-academic employees at a large university, consideration was significantly more strongly correlated with satisfaction with work for subordinates who had female supervisors than for subordinates with male supervisors. Closer examination of the data showed that this difference was largely due to the fact that low consideration displayed by a female supervisor was associated with much lower job satisfaction in comparison to low consideration exhibited by male supervisors. The sex-role congruence hypothesis for females was also supported by a later study (Petty & Miles, 1976). This study of 51 directors of county-level social service agencies showed that consideration behaviors of female supervisors were more positively related to subordinate satisfaction with the supervisor and more negatively related to subordinate propensity to leave than were male consideration behaviors.

Contradictory results have been found for the sex-role congruence hypothesis for initiation, i.e., that male supervisor initiating structure would be more positively related to subordinate satisfaction and motivation than female initiation. The hypothesis was not

supported by Petty and Lee's (1975) study, but found support in the later Petty and Miles (1976) study. More studies on the effects of supervisor initiation are needed to trace out specific conditions under which certain relationships occur.

Sex of subordinate. Studies looking into the influence of the sex of the subordinate on evaluations of leadership style are fewer and much more equivocal than the studies on effects of supervisor sex. Two general competing hypotheses are considered in these studies. The first suggests that differences exist in the eye of the male or female beholder; thus, male and female evaluators, or subordinates, will differ in their evaluations of the same supervisory style. The second hypothesis suggests that, given the pervasiveness of sex-role influences, male and female evaluators will have similar reactions to perceived supervisory behaviors.

Most of the evidence appears to support the second hypothesis. Rosen and Jerdee (1973) showed similar male and female evaluation of the effectiveness of several supervisory styles in hypothetical situations. Hansen (1974) found no significant sex differences in the relationships between job satisfaction and supervisor facilitation and supervisor support. Likewise, Drexler and Beehr (1977), in an analysis of national probability sample data collected in 1973, found no differences between men and women in the relationships

between their satisfaction on a number of work facets and supervisor behaviors--i.e., supervisor support, team building, goal emphasis, and work facilitation.

Bartol & Butterfield's (1976) recent study of hypothetical leadership behaviors gave support to both hypotheses. In support of the first hypothesis--leadership is in the eye of the beholder--they found that female subjects gave more favorable evaluations to the initiating style of managers regardless of their sex than did male subjects. The same study, however, found no sex differences in reactions to considerate supervisory behavior, thus supporting the argument of pervasive stereotypes.

Supervisor and subordinate sex. Recent research has gone beyond investigating the independent effects of supervisor sex or subordinate sex. The notion of supervision being an interactive process has led to questions about joint effects of supervisor and subordinate sex. It might be suggested, for example, that a male subordinate of a female supervisor, rarely as such cases occur, would react differently to his supervisor than would a female subordinate of the same supervisor. Studies of this nature are still very few and results are still only suggestive.

Different sex pair. Rosen and Jerdee's (1973) laboratory study examined the way sex-role stereotypes influence evaluations of male

and female supervisory behavior. Undergraduates and bank supervisors read one of six versions of a supervisory problem (with sex of supervisors and subordinates varied) and evaluated the effectiveness of four supervisory styles--threat, reward, helping, and friendly-dependent. The results show interaction effects for the friendly-dependent style: both males and females reacted more favorably to a friendly and dependent approach when their supervisors were of the other sex. Results along the same lines were found in Petty and Lee's (1975) later field study--they found that the relationships between supervisor consideration and subordinate job satisfaction were higher when supervisors and subordinates were of different sexes.

Sex differences among subordinates of female supervisors. An interesting finding that has started to emerge in these studies is that the sex of subordinates only affects reactions to female supervisors. Male subordinates with female supervisors tend to be much less satisfied with work and with their supervisors than subordinates of either sex under male supervisors or female subordinates under female supervisors (Petty & Lee, 1975). These dissatisfied male subordinates perceived their female supervisors as lower in consideration--usually associated with positive feelings--and higher in initiation than did subordinates in the other three groups.

High initiation by female supervisors, whether real or imagined,

clashes with sex-role expectations. While both males and females who are supervised by a high initiation female may be uncomfortable with this incongruency, male subordinates have to cope with the additional burden of status inconsistency by virtue of being a male dominated by a female. Thus it is understandable that initiating structure by female supervisors is negatively related to satisfaction for male subordinates, but was positively or not related to satisfaction for female subordinates (Petty & Lee, 1975; Petty & Miles, 1976). It should be noted, however, that while female subordinates react relatively well to initiation on the part of female supervisors, they react significantly more positively to initiation by male supervisors.

Women and Leadership as Power

The literature on leadership styles focuses on the relationships between leaders and their subordinates, employing what can be called a downward-looking perspective. Leadership can also be viewed looking upward and outward, with the concern shifting to the relationships between the leaders and their supervisors, as well as the rest of the organization. This view of leadership considers leadership as the possession and effective use of power. Power, in turn, is defined in Kanter's (1977) terms -- it is "the ability to get things done, to mobilize resources" (p. 166) or "the ability to get for the group, for subordinates or followers a favorable share of resources, opportunities and rewards possible through the organization." (p. 168). This definition of power

is closer to the concepts of mastery and autonomy than to domination of others.

Power outside one's own work group has been shown to affect subordinate morale just as much as does the leader's style (Pelz, 1952). In this early industrial study, Pelz showed that supportiveness in a supervisor was not sufficient to obtain high-morale in the work group; the other necessary ingredient was that the supervisor have sufficient influence over the people in higher positions in the organization regarding how decisions were made in the depratment as a whole.Along the same lines, Kanter (1977) found that effective managers in a large corporation were perceived as having "credibility" -- a combination of competence and power. Credibility upwards with one's superiors was a prerequisite to credibility downwards with one's subordinates. Thus, leaders who are perceived as being more powerful are more effective at getting people to do things and to feel more satisfied about it.

Very little research has focused on power among male and female leaders. Hansen's (1974) analysis of a national sample survey is one of the few empirical pieces that compares female and male leaders on any dimension of power. She reports that female supervisors have significantly less autonomy on the job than their male counterparts. One reason for such differences may be that the term "leader" or "supervisor" encompasses such a wide range of functions and organizational levels as to be virtually meaningless without further qualification. Kanter's (1977) study showed that referring to male and female supervisors had different meanings altogether, since male and female supervisors were typically found in different types of positions, and the women leaders were found only in the most powerless situations. Roussell (1974) studied high school administrators, supposedly

a relatively homogeneous group, and found large differences between the men and women in their mobility prospects and past histories. Such differences reflected power differences in their present positions in their organizations.

It can readily be assumed that there are power differences between men and women in organizations because they are typically found at different levels in the system. Less obvious, perhaps, are the differences in real power that exist among male and female leaders who occupy comparable formal positions. Clearly, formal titles of leadership do not automatically provide their holders with corresponding power and influence. A recent study (Veiga and Yanouzas, 1976) provides some information pertinent to this issue. Female and male mangers who were matched in age, education, salary, and level of organizational responsibility, were asked to profile their present (or actual) and their ideal management positions on thirty-five management activities, e.g. scheduling, goal setting, and forecasting. These activities were grouped into five traditional management functions: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. For each function, a Disillusionment Index was calculated to reflect the ratio of the number of overlapping items in the real and ideal checklists, to the number of ideal activities checked. The study found that women maangers had higher levels of disillusionment overall, and that disillusionment differences between the two groups of managers were particularly noticeable for the Planning and Organizing functions. Women managers seemed to be less involved in the policy formulation and goal setting aspects in the organization. More studies exploring the non-formal distribution of functions for male and female leaders are needed.

The impact of power distribution on the effectiveness of male and female leaders also warrants investigation. Kanter (1977) suggests that the negative reactions typically found for women supervisors can be accounted for, in large part, by their relative powerlessness in the organization. She lists a series of hypotheses regarding the effects of power-holding and powerlessness in organizations (e.g. effects on group morale, supervisory style, territoriality, subordinate resistance and effectiveness) which should be tested empirically.

Concluding Remarks

The study of leadership is only beginning to include a concern for women leaders. As in other rapidly evolving situations, realities change almost as soon as they are studied, making stable conclusions difficult to draw. At this point, however, it appears that a few general statements can be made about women and leadership.

First, there continue to be strong beliefs about differences in personality traits and leadership styles between female leaders and their male counterparts which are not supported by research data. Thus, contrary to popular beliefs, female leaders are not more

emotional and suggestible, or less decisive, aggressive, and objective than male leaders. Also contrary to notions about sex-specialization in leadership styles, women leaders appear to behave in similar fashion to their male colleagues.

Second, although there have been no consistent sex differences found among leaders, there are large differences in subordinate reactions to similar behaviors when exhibited by male and female leaders. In general, considerate female behavior is valued more than considerate male behavior, and male initiating behavior is assessed more positively than female initiation.

Third, awareness of the complexities of leader-subordinate interactions has led to examination of the effects of different sex combinations of leaders and followers. Results of these studies are still inconclusive, although, as one might expect, the most negative reactions appear to occur among male subordinates of female supervisors.

Fourth, while a number of intricacies are beginning to be uncovered on the relationships among supervisor and subordinate sex and leadership styles, studies have found consistently that subordinates, regardless of sex, like supervisors who are "considerate" and "employee centered." The consistently positive effects of consideration are in sharp contrast to the contradictory findings

on the effects of initiation. While everyone enjoys being treated in a considerate fashion by others, reactions to task-oriented initiating behaviors appear to be much more affected by sex-role expectations, and such reactions depend to a great extent on which sex is initiating and which is reacting.

Finally, the issue of power in male and female leaders needs further exploration. Power, not leadership style or leader personality, may account for the generally negative reactions to females in leadership positions -- without real influence, women who hold formal titles of leadership cannot function effectively as they are expected. Their lack of effectiveness affects not only themselves, but the subordinates who report to them.

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